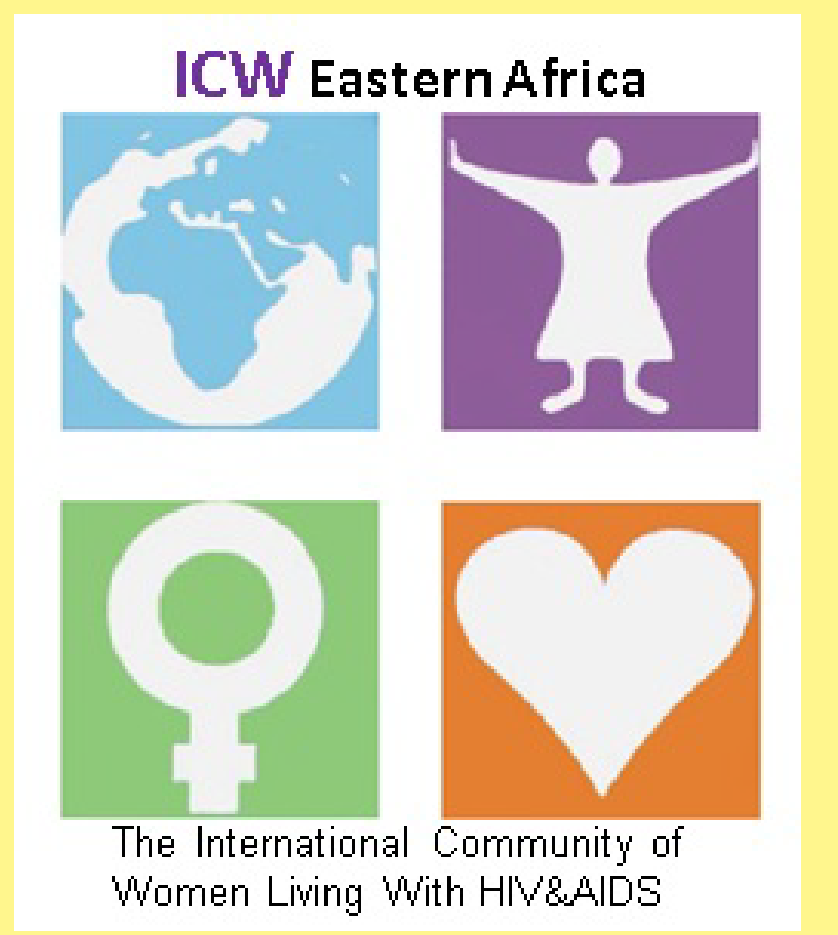
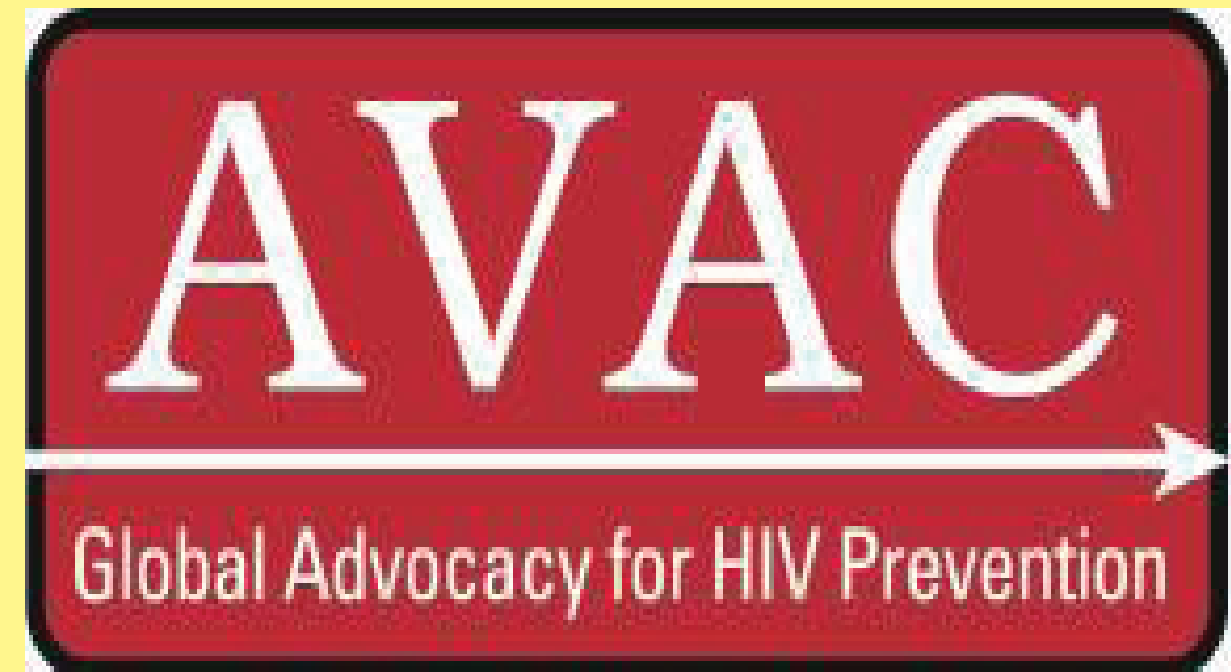


Ugandan Service Provider Perspectives on the WHO Recommendation on Hormonal Contraceptives and HIV Risk



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Introduction:

The World Health Organization issued a Technical Statement on hormonal contraceptives and HIV risk in February 2012. It states that current data were not sufficiently conclusive to change the Medical Eligibility Criteria (MEC) on contraceptive use. It also contained a clarification recommending that, because of potential HIV risk, women using progesterone-only injectable contraception (Depo-provera) should be strongly advised to also use condoms or other prevention measures.

This advocacy work is designed to enlighten women with evidence that will aid their advocacy efforts for improved family planning and HIV prevention, and to generate and present the perspectives of women on key issues and next steps to the agencies and policy makers, to ensure that women are engaged as meaningful allies in implementation of next steps related to this issue.

Description:

- This work is based on an established methodology of “evidence-based advocacy” in which civil society reviews and discusses issues, gathers relevant information, and consolidates recommendations and questions so that individuals and organizations can play an active role in the discussions of key issues.
- Following the release of new data in October 2012 showing an association between some forms of hormonal contraceptives and HIV risk, and in advance of the WHO technical consultation to review the current classifications of hormonal contraceptives; women advocates from 5 countries (Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe) gathered in January 2012 to discuss the data and their implications. This effort informed women and also prepared a civil society perspective then presented at the WHO technical consultation to inform the development of the WHO technical guidance.

Methods

- Upon the release of the guidance note, the women reviewed its core content and developed key questions including the degree to which the recommendation was affecting service provider activities in country. One on one interviews were conducted to assess Family Planning/HIV/AIDS service provider perspectives of the WHO technical statement. Providers from non-governmental organizations (N= 4); selected based on their wide coverage both in the urban and rural areas of Uganda were interviewed about (1) their knowledge of the WHO statement, (2) how it had influenced their operations, and (3) any plans they had to implement the recommendations.

Key findings

- All providers were aware of the WHO statement. None had modified their operations and had no plans to act on the WHO recommendation since the guidance didn't change. They stated that they would only adjust their operations if the MEC changed. They viewed the clarification as an “advocacy issue (politics)” that could be done away with.
- Providers expressed no intention of communicating the potential HIV risk of Depo-provera to women because they feared the information would cause many to abandon all family planning (FP) hence contributing to high maternal deaths; yet the women thought otherwise.

Ongoing work

- The service provider views informed the WHO/ UNAIDS/UNFPA and stakeholders Consultation on Hormonal Contraceptive & HIV: Moving from new recommendations to actionable information, 7th – 8th May 2012. A report of this meeting with recommendations has been shared to-date and a technical document that will offer more direct guidance to programmes and policy-makers about this topic is being worked on. This document will draw on both the May consultation as well as the prior Technical Consultation that was held earlier this year. Also a communication strategy will be developed to this effect.
- The next phase of this project is ongoing and involves additional stakeholder interviews to identify barriers to and opportunities for increasing contraceptive “method mix” in Uganda- one of the recommendations from the WHO technical statement and the May meeting on communicating the technical statement; as well as ongoing monitoring of WHO and other agency activities at an international level.

Conclusion

- For the providers, the new recommendation is interpreted as needing no change in approach; yet not only women and civil society but also WHO and the Technical meeting thought that by having a clarification, service providers would effect changes in approach and communication to the service users.
- HIV, FP, and maternal health are equally important and should be addressed simultaneously through integration efforts.
- Concurrently, providers should give accurate information to women about available contraception methods so they can make informed FP and HIV prevention choices.
- Trainings to enhance integration should prepare providers to accurately address these concurrent needs while protecting patients' right to information.
- WHO should act on its recent commitment to release the technical document and communication strategy that will guide policy and programmes.

References

- Hormonal contraception and HIV: WHO Technical statement. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2012; http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/family_planning/rhr_12_8.